C. Rann Kennedy Interviewed Himself Enthusiastically While Kate Carew Gasped

The Author of "The Terrible Meek" Overflowed with a Flood of Words That Ran in Many Channels, While His Caller Managed to Slip in an Occasional Question.

The Ground Covered by the Preacher-Author-Actor-Playwright-Student Ranged from the Little Theatre to Socialism, from Patriotism to Doctrines.

By Kate Carew.

MR. CHARLES RANN KENNEDY—C. Rann Kennedy, as he signs himself—opened the door of the living room to my timid knock. Some hearth-and-home celebrity has asserted that there is no house big enough for two married stars. Mr. and Mrs. Rann Kennedy (Miss Ethel Wynne Matthison) have checkmated any possible difficulty by settling in a duplex-studio apartment.

I stepped inside. Mr. Rann Kennedy removed his weed. I my goloshes.

Miss Matthison was at rehearsal. The servant in the house had an afternoon out. There was not a chaperon, not even a parrot in sight.

Outside it rained cats and dogs.

Inside it soon began to rain words, sentences, phrases, paragraphs, books, libraries, British museums. Sometimes they spluttered, sometimes splashed, sometimes merely rippled.

For Mr. C. Rann Kennedy is a born orator. Beside his Niagara of eloquence the thin, purling line of talk of the usual interview is as a tiny brook to a mighty river, bred in mountain fastnesses, fed by roaring streams, bursting all limitations of space and strength.

My editor had suggested socialism as a topic. I intended to begin with the Old Testament patriarchal system, steeplechase through the early and middle ages down to our troublous times, where coal and wood, butter and eggs, spring lamb and green peas and strikes are of daily occurrence, the result of a heinous economic system which either should or should not be abolished. I thought we would decide this in the interview.

There was not a moment granted me to tell what I knew about the system of Karl Marx, Fourier, John Stuart Mills, Plato, H. G. Wells, Ricardo. Actually, I didn't even have a second to say that no man who designed such a lovely easy chair as did William Morris could be wrong in his political views.

HE PLAYED IT ALONE.

A post-graduate in the course of interviewing, Mr. C. Rann Kennedy simply took the burden off my shoulders. Once in a while he looked toward me as if to say, "Are you still there?" I was.

With my usual pertinacity—and it wasn't easy, my dears—I managed to get in a question now and then.

And another thing, his memory is as colossal as his vocabulary. I didn't have to correct him once, not even when he quoted whole pages of Sophocles and Euripides to illustrate some minor point, as he did frequently.

He began by speaking of his new play, just produced at The Little Theatre.

There is nothing autobiographical about the title.

"'The Terrible Meek,'" said he, "whether it rises or falls, will be read all over the civilized world. The morning of the day it was produced it was received by the Czar, the Pope, the Kaiser, kings, queens, great teachers, ecclesiastical heads, prominent editors, its arrival timed to correspond with its première here."

Later in the interview Mr. C. Rann Kennedy asserts as one who knows, "Thank God, there is no real modesty about me." I cannot help snatching this from its context and inserting it here; it seems so weirdly apropos to his advertising method. I know he'll pardon me. His aura has the tint of forgiveness.

"Aren't you afraid to have a play with such a tremendous message in such a small theatre?" I piped. "My new Easter bonnet burst its box."

"The Little Theatre is wonderful," is his answer. "It is Anglo-Saxon in comfort; Japanese in that you have a splendid idea of space, due to the prefect proportions. Not a word is lost there, not an inflection, not a gesture. There can be no skimpy acting, no halting phrases. Everything is intimate, as are the comedies and tragedies of the home."

Mr. Kennedy then paid several compliments to Winthrop Ames as director, which I remember only in a general way, for I was busy with my mental photograph.

If the prophet Ezekiel ever stopped anathematizing and played with the children he would have looked, I am sure, as does C. Rann Kennedy, who has the face of a seer, which is, however, quite young and mirth loving. His psychic quality never suggests the star gazing variety, nor his physical the animal, but both are there, carefully blended.

And in the rim of that face are contained curious little roundish eyes that have looked at the world with good purpose, for there is no malice, fear, resentment, pessimism in their brown depths. He has the scholar's brow, topped with a lion's mane, which he tosses to and fro, balancing many gestures, for his words are never just words, they are vital expressions of thought, energizing his whole big, healthy body. He is tall, broad shouldered, shows all the forty years he admits, and his complexion refutes any theory that he has looked at life through a stained glass window.

I don't mean to insinuate that Mr. Kennedy is a modern Samson and that the wall of his apartment would fall in if the barber should become absent-minded some morning, but I do wonder how he would seem if his mane were cropped.

"Are you an American citizen?" I asked.

Now, don't blame me for asking it. It is a question that naturally suggests itself. He speaks of himself as a clergyman, but he is, in reality, preacher and politician combined, a sort of composite picture of John Knox and William J. Bryan. With his pipe high in air, his attitude of expounder and scholar, his vast vocabulary, which does not ignore a variety of curses suited to a Southern colonel, C. Rann Kennedy would be a great political asset for the G. O. P. or the Tammany organization. We have imported clergymen, actors, art directors, painters, why not a politician now and then?

At my interrogation, Mr. Kennedy rises and declaims, as from an imaginary carttail.

AS REGARDS HIS PREFERENCE.

"I have made an application for citizenship, but I am sorry to say my papers will not be received in time to vote, for"——

"I couldn't make out whether he said 'Teddy' or 'Taft.' While uttering the name his pipe needed sudden attention, and a long, shrill shriek through the stem was all the information I got, except a 'T.'

"Why?"

I put the question in monosyllabic form, thinking he might be deceived; that I intended to ask why vote for Teddy when Taft was here, or vice versa.

He wasn't caught by my subtlety.

"I became an American citizen, primarily because I am earning my living here and I do not believe that such an outworn, narrow and bitter emotion like patriotism should prevent a man from taking up his political responsibilities, wherever he is economically attached."

Of course that idea of patriotism was new to me. I hesitated for an answer which should embody the principles of the Declaration and Patrick Henry's famous address, "When in the course of human events," and "My lords, what have I to say," etc.

He did not wait for me to frame it. The smoke came in tiny, grayish puffs.

"That does not mean that I am less a patriot, but that I am more, much more. The world is my parish, as John Wesley said. Incidentally, I also love America. I think it is the finest place in the world to live in. And I don't say this to throw bouquets, as I fancy my plays will show, by and by. There's a lot to alter in America, also, before it becomes paradise."

"Certainly our suburbs don't suggest the Garden of Eden—yet," I sighed.

His attitude on the imaginary cart tail recalled to my mind the London Socialist meetings in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons.

So I asked, diffidently:

"Do you think a sort of-er-Hyde Park-er-focus would help us to settle any of our problems?"

HYDE PARK NOT NEEDED HERE.

"There is no necessity for the Hyde Park gathering in America. The essential idea of Hyde Park is a place where blackguards and outcasts like myself can get up and prophesy against wickedness in high places. America is one vast, splendid park of vagabonds where we may all, everywhere, get up and talk as we please. And we do, talk as we please. There are signs, however, of the old, evil, aristocratic mouth-gagging coming along even here. So there is fear of damnation for this land, too."

Mercy. I must get him off that subject. Too cursy for me.

"What is your doctrine?" I inquired, soothingly. Doctrine is a nice, elastic word.

"I don't draw lines. I preach a spiritual change of heart. I'm a clergyman, not a lawyer. . . . 'Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.' This doesn't mean that I don't recognize the perfectly obvious and simple business proposition of nationalizing as quickly as possible all the big industries, to be followed just as quickly by the little ones. That's only the job of a level-headed grocer; there's no difficulty about a simple thing like that. No real thinker during the last hundred years ever supposed there would be any difficulty about it. It's only the rich people who pretend there is. I wonder why? I don't think it is necessarily going to increase happiness of the lasting kind; although it will make it easier for a great many people to try and be happy. Happiness is a spiritual quality, and just at present demands a change of heart to attain it."

He was on the right path, making straight for all sorts of socialistic utterances. He must be kept there.

I murmured something about taxes, income and inheritance.

"Inheritance tax; oh, yes, excellent. An income tax might do it if the people willed it that way and had it properly graduated up to the point of extinguishing capital held by individuals at a certain point."

Mercy, again! I don't know about taking that increase of salary. Trouble ahead.

"Will the personal element enter too closely when women vote?"

"Is it possible"—such an emphasis on that "possible"—"for women to be more influenced by personal feeling than the man voter is? Any way, I had rather trust the fate of the world to woman's personal feelings, which include the love of children, a sense of cleanliness, purity and order, faith in God and loyalty, pity and the desire of helping broken things, than to the personal feelings of many men. I can't imagine women selling the things they love for a lump of dirty money or for place. Not woman generally. Not woman free. Not woman with a vote in her hand."

I loved that "desire of helping broken things."

It seems to your Aunt Kate, my dears, as if that sums up the whole question of woman's present attitude—the desire of coming, as a Red Cross nurse comes to a battlefield, bringing gentleness, mercy and those other qualities Mr. Kennedy named to patch up the broken down, incompetent systems that have brought neither serenity, happiness nor freedom to a world which has fought long and strenuously and gained none of the things that are really worth while. I would like to have said this, but it was not my interview.

But it was the thought of these "real things" that prompted my next inquiry.

"Will socialism correct the conditions which lead to strikes?"

"Yes. Socialism will do so by securing to the worker the benefits of his labor in peace and foresight and justice instead of driving him to obtain it by war. Strikes are warfare, and in their resulting agony and loss just as damnable as soldiers' warfare—only a little more justifiable. At present we are all being hoodwinked and bossed by a pack of thieving shopkeepers in high places. We must get rid of these fellows. Not by bomb and 'la lanterne' and the other bloody minded furies of an exasperated populace, but by the spiritual means of repentance, common sense and civilization. We must civilize them carefully, lovingly, but finally out of existence, at the same time taking care to civilize their brutal unbeliefs out of our own hearts.

A STUDY IN OPPOSING TONES.

A cathedral stillness invaded the room, lending additional tranquillity to its soft tones. The harmonious incongruity of this man, with his strange creeds, his actor nature, his weird vocabulary, hexameters and curses hurled by turns, his acrobatic poses, pleased my artist soul. I was lost in contemplation of the picture until his voice, like a musical bomb, again exploded amid the gray shadows.

"As a matter of fact we are all tarred with the same vulgarity, the workingman just as much as the capitalist. What we want is a change of heart, the world over. Then will come the real Revolution, the real Reign of Terror, which is going to bring peace on earth. Only I prefer the more ancient names for this event: 'The coming of the Lord in clouds of glory;' or again, 'the Kingdom of Heaven on earth!'"

"Will socialism end in bloodshed?"

"I cannot say. I am inclined to think that here changes will be brought about by the ballot. In England blood may be shed, unless some big man comes. I had rather a big mob than a big man. But I don't mind the big man if he does mob's work. And by mob I don't mean a violent rabble of despairing drunkards hot with blood lust. I mean God's mob—the common people, people like you and me, the outsiders who do the work. I don't know that a compromising Liberal politician is quite the big man of my mind, although I recognize gladly and thankfully Asquith's recent action—as to government interference in the direction of enforcing a minimum wage in the case of the miners, which ought to have been done before."

"And you choose the drama to promulgate your views?"

Coils from the calabash.

"Yes. In sixty or eighty years America will be to the modern world what Greece was to the ancient. Its theatre will express the national life as the Greek theatre did in the Attic days when all social, domestic and religious questions were answered on the stage in the sight and sound of the people."

"Will plays be merely local—short lived then?" I inquired.

"The Greek drama lives. The plays of Shakespeare and Molière live. Punch and Judy lives. There is no hypocrisy in any of them. They are concise and real. You can't have a sincere drama unless you have a sincere national life."

"By sincerity you mean realism?"

"Not necessarily. If by realism you mean to inquire, must a playwright be a murderer in order to know how to depict one. The artist must have a receptive power, but he must have a resisting one as well. He should, by sympathy, observation, experience come in contact with life. He should know which brush to use for his picture."

Mr. C. Rann Kennedy twiddled the thumb and fingers of his pipeless hand.

"I hate the twiddly, fiddly-faddly young men who splash paint and call it art, splash words and call it literature—vile little cads who talk chivalry, but haven't a touch of it in their souls. They 'dope' you with the poisonous phrases—word delirium, mere phosphorescent scum hiding corruption. It's because chivalry is only a cant word that the middle class English woman to-day is in such a deplorable condition. You cannot conceive what she's had to endure. Thank God the end's in sight! If the good old-fashioned 'squire,' with his kind heart and rambunctious ways had endured, who knows how different things might have been—but he has practically passed along."

Mr. Kennedy twists his legs about in his wrath and disappears into the depths of his coat, leaving a fringe of hair visible over his coat collar. His clothes express rage, raised to the *n*th power.

"I find the high brow muckers perfectly irritating. I'm sick of all the rot they talk about 'impressions'—tea cup brands of emotion."

"Do you write down to the lowest intelligence?" I manage to get in.

"I love the lowest intelligence in the same degree that I loathe the so-called 'intellectual' point of view. Take John Masefield's work; how many of the 'intellectuals' appreciate it? I have heard he was a bar-keep here on your East Side; now London acclaims him as one of her big poets. He is, for he is sincere. He didn't go out looking for 'life' so he could write about his experiences. He went plodding along, and when the time came and he could step on and up he did, and gave his message to the world because he had found it in the natural sequence of events."

THE MODERN TOUCH.

"What do you mean by the modern touch?"

"When the Oxford or Harvard men, as the case may be, come out of college they have wonderful, original ideas. They have poetry, history, philosophy, 'at their fingers' ends, but when they try to put their ideas into words they become academic, cap and gowny. Now, a young chap like Sheldon has the real modern touch. He expresses himself in everyday words. He puts his characters in an everyday environment. His work is classic in its simplicity, but there is no cultured withdrawal. He comes from his alma mater a perfect boy in experience and gives a clean-cut, forcible expression of what he sees about him and feels. There is no emotion in life that Sophocles did not express, and if Sophocles were alive to-day he would have 'the modern touch' as he had it when he wrote."

There are great truths treated of in Mr. Kennedy's play, "The Terrible Meek," and they are clothed in common words.

I ask: "Did you have the modern touch in mind when you wrote it?"

"I certainly did. It brings the message closer home. When I am travelling about from church to church, from meeting house to meeting house, from carttail to carttail, I often read the Bible and give the words a little cockney turn, an East Side twist, a bit of brogue, now and then. The people like it. Just that little human note seems to bridge over the great chasm of years. Simplicity—that's the whole story.

"You've adored your Emerson and ignored Walt Whitman. You've got to learn where to find simplicity, and, when found, to appreciate it. I've said that before, I know, but I'm an awful egotist—and it takes a profound egotist like I am"——

He gives a sort of chuckling look as if he expected me to contradict. I didn't. But I don't object to an egotist if only his actions match his words.

"Carlyle used tons of rhetoric to preach the value of silence. I say the same thing over and over to urge simplicity. World of paradoxes. I'm one. But Whitman was simple. Your poets don't have to hark back to Swinburne, who had a wonderful gift of words, or to old Tennyson, who, to my mind, had a finer imagination."

"Lady Warwick," said I, introducing one celebrity to another, "made practically the same remark."

"Because she has a sincere outlook."

"Some people question that sincerity."

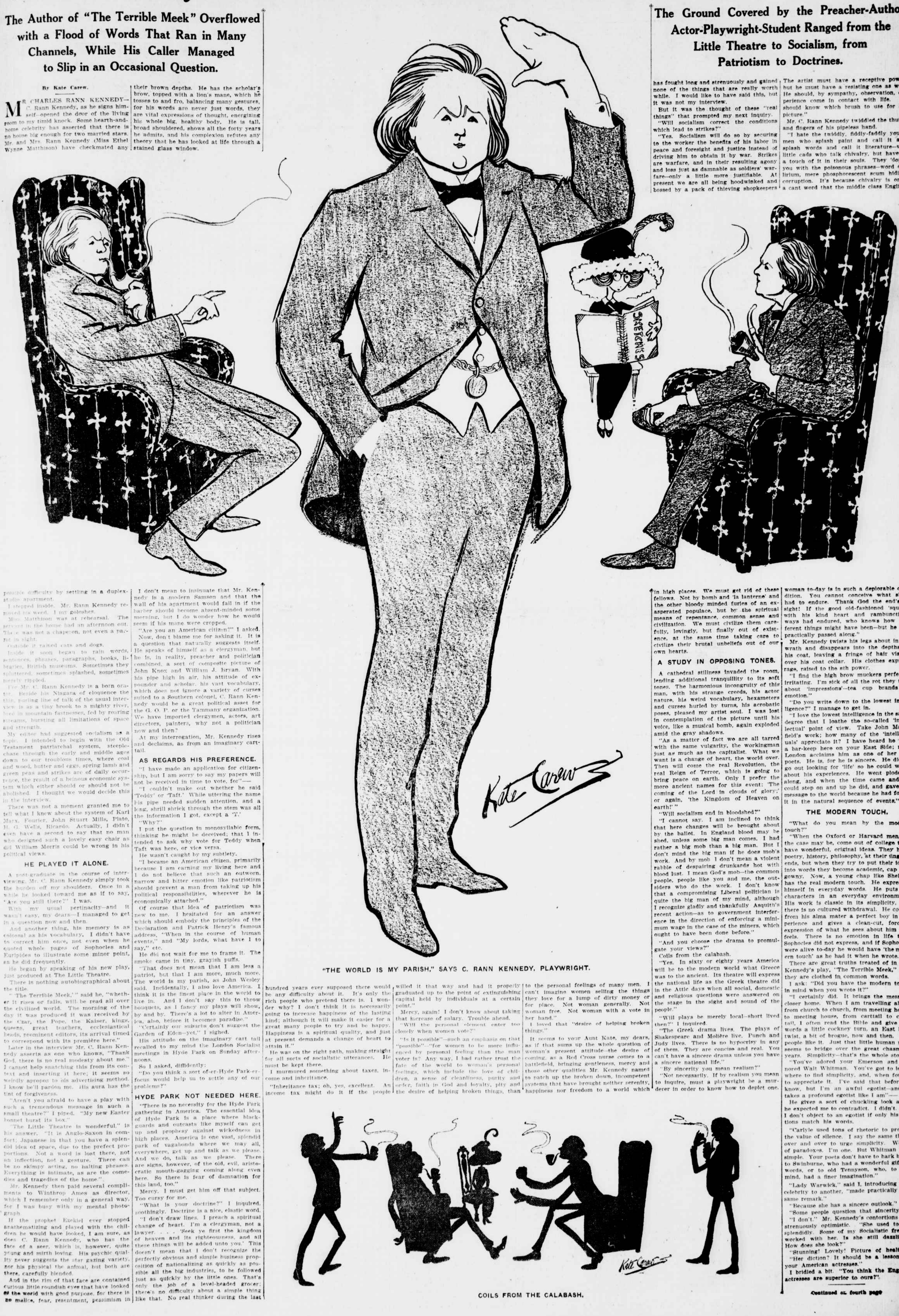
"I don't." Mr. Kennedy's contortions are strenuously optimistic. "She used to be splendidly. Some of my Socialistic frends worked with her. Is she still dazzling? How does she look?"

"Stunning! Lovely! Picture of health!"

"Her diction? It should be a lesson to your American actresses."

I bridled a bit. "You think the English actresses are superior to ours?"

Continued on fourth page



"THE WORLD IS MY PARISH," SAYS C. RANN KENNEDY, PLAYWRIGHT.

COILS FROM THE CALABASH.